

*“The thing that is really hard, and really amazing, is giving up on being perfect and beginning the work of becoming yourself.”*

**Anna Quindlen**

# Grey Matters

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Welcome to all new and returning families of RJG. Many of us at RJG have spent the summer preparing the school for the new school year. The floors are shining, all the materials have arrived, and there is a refreshed energy in the air. All that is missing now are the students. I am thrilled that school is ready to begin.

Let me start by congratulating Head Custodian Bob Daley and all the members of his team for doing an outstanding job preparing the building for the first day of school. It never ceases to amaze me how much work goes into maintaining a building of our size, yet year after year, Bob and his crew come through. We are very lucky to have such a top notch and dedicated group taking care of our school.

The teachers have also been in the building throughout the summer updating their curriculum, getting their classrooms in order, and preparing for the school year. They are just as excited as I am about getting the year under way.

As you know by now, we have changed how students learn their team assignments. Instead of waiting until the first day of school (as was the procedure in the past), students were able to learn their team assignments on Friday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, either by looking at the lists posted at the school, or on our new website. It is our hope that this early information has reduced student anxiety and will make the first day of school more comfortable.

Every year, we hear the perennial question from students, “How are teams made?”, and more importantly, “Why can’t I be with my best friend?” In the past, this question was asked within the first fifteen minutes of school if a student was not teamed with a specific friend or friends. To their surprise, however, most of these students found that within the next six hours of the school day that there indeed were friends on their team and lots of other people they were looking forward to getting to know.

In an effort to reduce those fearful moments of sitting in an auditorium waiting for their names to be called, we may have increased the time between students learning they are not on the same team as their best friend and the realization that their new team is chock full of other old and new friends. Simply put, there is no easy way to reduce the “before school starts” anxiety. Whether we inform them a few days before school starts or the day of, no amount of parental reassurance is going to completely take away that nervousness. As a parent of two daughters, I see it myself. What I also see is the change between the anxious eyes that leave the house in the morning and the look of excitement on their faces at the end of the day.

With all that said, you may still be asking yourself, “but how are teams made in the first

place?” We have over 930 students enrolled at RJG this year and four teams per grade. With these large numbers, a significant portion of the summer was spent building the teams in order to balance them by: sending school, gender, World Language request, and teacher recommendations. Ultimately, it is impossible to assure that every student is teamed with “that special friend.” I am confident, however, that the teams have been built in a manner which will ensure that every student will have the opportunity to maintain old friendships and develop new ones throughout the school year in an academically challenging environment.

We are always trying to find new ways to provide a high level of support for our students and make a large school feel smaller. For a number of years we have achieved this “school within a school” feeling by dividing our students into teams where they are able to work with five core teachers and a smaller group of teachers. In an effort to add to this “school within a school” we are now assigning the counselors and assistant principals to teams as well. We believe that this approach will increase communication between the adults and provide increased support for the students.

While it was mentioned in the summer letter, I want to remind everyone about the new attendance procedure at RJG. If your child will be absent from or late to school, please call the absence line at (978)264-4700 (ex: 3333) by 7:30AM and state your child’s:

1. name (and please spell the name)
2. grade and team
3. if your child is absent or will be tardy

After parent volunteers transcribe the information from the voicemail, our office staff will then compare the messages with our homeroom attendance records. Students who are marked absent in homeroom but for whom we did not receive a call will be marked as “unexcused.” An unexcused absence will generate a phone call home. Please assist us in this new process and remember to call the school if your child will be absent or tardy. Remember that we still need your child to bring in a note for our records when he/she returns. To assist you in this process, we have ordered refrigerator magnets containing the absence line phone number for every student. Keep your eyes open, they should be coming home in your child’s backpack within a couple weeks.

I am looking forward to seeing everyone on our Back To School Night on September 30<sup>th</sup>. On that evening, you will have the opportunity to meet with your child’s teacher and learn more about the programs offered at RJG. If, however, you have any questions, please do not wait. Teachers can be reached easily through email or voicemail. The format for our email is first initial, last name, followed by our server address (mail.ab.mec.edu). For example, my address is [chardimon@mail.ab.mec.edu](mailto:chardimon@mail.ab.mec.edu). Teachers can also be reached through voicemail by calling our main number (978)264-4700 and asking for the teacher’s voice mail.

Again, welcome to the 2004-05 school year at RJG. It’s going to be a fantastic year!